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CHAUCER AND DANTE

Dante is well known to have directly influenced some scores of lines of Chaucer's poetry, but several other passages, not without interest, seem to have been generally overlooked. In one of them Chaucer may almost as justly be charged with bringing the heavenly Venus down into the service of the earthly as in Troilus' hymn to Love (III, 1261-67), for which he pillages St. Bernard's hymn to Mary at the end of the "Paradiso." The former passage also is to be found in the "Troilus and Criseyde," where the heroine is reproaching herself for having left Troy and Troilus (V, 743-49):

To late is now to speke of this matere;
Prudence, alas! oon of thyn eyen three
Me lakked alwey, er that I cam here;
On tyme y-passed wel remembred me;
And present tyme eek coude I wel y-see.
But futur tyme, er I was in the snare,
Coude I not seen; that causeth now my care.

In the mystic Triumph of the Church, at the end of the "Purgatorio," on the left of the chariot dance the four cardinal virtues, led by Prudence (XXIX, 130-32):

Dalla sinistra quattro facean festa,
In porpora vestite, dietro al modo
D'una di lor, ch' avea tre occhi in testa.

This symbolism is accounted for by a passage in the *Convito*.¹ Dante follows the pseudo-Seneca² in making Prudence relate to past, present, and future, but he alone, so far as has been found,

¹ "Conviensi adunque essere *Prudente*, cioè *Savio*: e a ciò essere si richiede buona memoria delle vedute cose, e buona conoscenza delle presenti, e buona provvidenza delle future."—"Convito," IV, 27, 42-46 (E. Moore, *Tutte le opere di Dante*, Oxford, 1894).

² Two passages are quoted and attributed to Seneca by Dante's son to illustrate the "Purgatorio" passage; see *Petri Allegherii super Dantis ipsius genitoris comoediam commentarium*, edited by Lord Vernon (Florence, 1845), p. 507; or see the notes on the passage by Scartazzini or Niccolò Tommaseo. The second of these quotations I have been unable to trace, but the first will be found in the *De formula honestae vitae, vel de quatuor virtutibus cardinalibus*, successively and erroneously attributed to Seneca (in the Middle Ages) and to Martin of Braga (Martinus Dumiensis), and usually published with their works; see the editions of Seneca by Friedrich Haase (Teubner, 1872), Vol. III, p. 470, and by M. N. Bouillet (Paris, 1829), Vol. IV, p. 450. On the authorship, see *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la*

gives her three eyes. Whether Chaucer is indebted to the "Convito" or to Dante's source,¹ or is giving an independent interpretation of Dante's sufficiently obvious symbolism, does not appear, but he certainly alludes to the passage in the "Purgatorio."

In the *balade* in both versions of the prologue to the "Legend of Good Women" (A, 206, 207; B, 252, 253), "Marcia Catoun" appears among exemplary wives:

Penalopee, and Marcia Catoun,
Mak of your wyfhod no comparisoun.

Mr. Lounsbury and Mr. Skeat believe² the reference to be derived from St. Jerome's mention, in his work against Jovinian, of "Marcia Catonis filia minor" among good wives in ancient history;³ a supposition the more natural since they believe the so-called version A of the prologue, later in which (281-304) this work of St. Jerome's is expressly named and described (as it is not in B), to be the earlier version. I wish to point out the probability that Chaucer did not derive his information from this work. The question is somewhat connected with that as to the priority of version A or B of the prologue. If A is the earlier, St. Jerome seems less unlikely to be the source than if B is the earlier; on the other hand, if the reference in the *balade* has a different source, all Chaucer's use of this work, so far as we

Bibliothèque nationale (Paris, 1890), Vol. XXXIII, Part 1, pp. 213-16, and cf. Part 2, p. 174; these references I owe to the kindness of Dr. G. L. Hamilton. The passage is quoted in a slightly wrong form by Albertano of Brescia, *Liber consolationis et consilii* (ed. by T. Sundby for the Chaucer Society, 1873), pp. 57, 58: "Si prudens es, animus tuus tribus temporibus dispensetur: praesentia ordina, futura provide, praeterita recordare," etc. It does not occur in the "Tale of Melibeus" (ultimately, of course, derived from this), which is greatly condensed where it would have come (B, 2390-2405). It is therefore probably not in Chaucer's French original (inaccessible to me), which is merely an adaptation of the Latin of Albertano. But the *De formula* and other works by the pseudo-Seneca are frequently quoted in Melibeus.

¹ Chaucer was certainly not very familiar with the "Convito," but Dr. Emil Koeppel (*Anglia*, Vol. XIII, p. 185) makes out a pretty good case for his having read this same part of it when he wrote the "Wife of Bath's Tale;" cf. *WBT*, D 1109-18, and "Gentillesse," 15, with "Convito," IV, 3, 43-55. When Chaucer wrote "Melibeus," there is no evidence that he made any use of Albertano's Latin (Emil Koeppel in *Herrig's Archiv*, Vol. LXXXVI, pp. 29-30); but when he wrote the "Merchant's Tale" he certainly used it (*ibid.*, pp. 38, 39). The tales of the Wife of Bath and the Merchant, however, were probably written some fifteen years after the "Troilus."

² *Studies in Chaucer*, Vol. II, p. 294; *Oxford Chaucer*, Vol. III, p. 299. A little later in the chapter of St. Jerome's work from which they cite might be found a better ground for their opinion than the one they give.

³ "Adversus Jovinianum," I, 46 (Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. XXIII, col. 275).

know, will fall into the period of the *Canterbury Tales*, which will slightly strengthen the argument for a late date for Prologue A. Since this question of priority has of late been vigorously reopened,¹ a discussion of the source of the reference seems timely.

A reading of the chapter in which St. Jerome refers to Marcia will show that there is far from being anything immediately convincing in Lounsbury's attribution. Her name occurs, it is true, among those of several of the heroines whom Chaucer mentions, and she is praised for lamenting her husband and refusing to marry again; but the reason she gave is that she could find no man who desired her more than her property. Several other "Mulieres Romanae Insignes" in this and the preceding chapters would have been, as Skeat himself admits in one case, much more suitable to figure in the *balade*—including Bilia, and especially Porcia, wife of Brutus. It is striking that in the only passage where Chaucer certainly uses this part of St. Jerome's work ("Franklin's Tale," F 1367-1456), from which he adduces a large number of virtuous women, including the two just mentioned, no Marcia appears. It is also noteworthy that St. Jerome immediately mentions the other Marcia, Cato's wife, with disapproval for her deficiencies in chastity and constancy. It might be supposed that Chaucer would avoid the possibility of such confusion, if he knew of the two; the curious addition which he makes of the father's and husband's name could hardly distinguish the daughter from the wife.²

¹ See John L. Lowes, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. XIX, pp. 593-683; and a recent Johns Hopkins dissertation, *The Problem of the Two Prologues to Chaucer's Legend of Good Women*, by John C. French (Baltimore: J. H. Furst Co., 1905).

² It is natural to inquire why Chaucer attaches Cato's name to Marcia's. Did he regard it as a patronymic or as an ordinary surname? After considerable search in Middle English and Old French I can find no parallel to "Marcia Catoun" as meaning "Marcia daughter of Cato," except that four times in "Melibeus" Chaucer mentions "Iesus Syrak;" in each case the words are the same in Albertano's Latin, as against "Iesus filius Syrak" in the more original "Merchant's Tale," E 2250, and "Jesu filii Sirach" twice in the Vulgate. That some of the scribes did not understand Chaucer's phrase as a patronymic is clear, for several of the manuscripts read "Penelope, Marcia and Catoun." Chaucer probably used the last word like a modern surname to distinguish this Marcia, not from her daughter, but from the other Marcia whom he mentions ("House of Fame," 1229-32), "Marcia that lost her skin," the satyr Marsyas, of course, whose name he had misunderstood (Dante, "Paradiso," I, 20). He was also, doubtless, not sorry to have another rhyme-word in *-oun*, in a poem where he required nine such rhymes. Lucan, "Pharsalia," II, 328-49 (Paris, 1830), tells the story of the elder Marcia, in terms which would hardly have recommended her for Chaucer's purpose, and speaks of her desire for the epitaph CATONIS MARCIA. But there

In the Divine Comedy, with which we know that Chaucer was perfectly familiar when he wrote the Legend of Good Women, Dante represents himself as meeting Marcia, the wife of Cato, in Limbo;¹ nothing is said, of course, as to the eccentric passages in her married life of which the saint speaks, but she has an honorable place among heroes and heroines of antiquity, virgins and chaste matrons, of whom two others, Lucretia and Lavinia, appear in Chaucer's *balade*. On the shores of Purgatory Virgil appeals to Cato in the name of his chaste and constant wife:

Ma son del cerchio ove son gli occhi casti
Di Marzia tua, che in vista ancor ti prega,
O santo petto, che per tua la tegni:
Per lo suo amore adunque a noi ti piega;—²

an appeal which Cato rejects only because earthly love can no longer affect him. Is not this a more probable source of Chaucer's reference than the other?

It even seems possible to point out a matter where Dante made some contribution to Chaucer's intellectual life. The only philosophical subject in which Chaucer shows any constant interest is the question as to the relation between fate and chance, divine foreordination and foreknowledge and human free-will; this subject he speaks of now indirectly, now lightly, now seriously, but he constantly speaks of it.³ He seems never to have quite made up his mind on the subject, but (especially early in his literary life) to have had a leaning to a kind of determinism. His attitude in the matter is thoroughly characteristic in its strong feeling, and

is little evidence that Chaucer knew that work. Skeat is certainly right in rejecting Bell's explanation of Chaucer's praise as due to her "complaisance" in being lent to Hortensius. "Marcia Catoun" is twice mentioned, along with Alcestis, by Lydgate, who is simply following Chaucer (Oxford *Chaucer*, Vol. VII, pp. 272, 289). Marcia the younger and her first remark appear in Deschamps' "Miroir de Mariage," 5434-48 (Paris, 1894; Vol. IX, p. 178), which follows St. Jerome, but they are used simply to show how mercenary people are.

¹ "Inferno," IV, 128.

² "Purgatorio," I, 78-81. Dante, quoting Lucan, allegorizes and tells more of her story in the Convito, IV, 28, 97-163.

³ For two long discussions, see "Troilus and Criseyde," IV, 958-1078 (largely from Boethius; greatly out of place where it occurs, and therefore indicative of Chaucer's personal interest), and "Nun's Priest's Tale," B 4424-40. Cf. also "Complaint of Mars," 218-26; "T. and C.," II, 621-23; V, 1550, 1551 (besides one or two passages derived from Boccaccio); "Legend of Good Women," 952, 2580-82; "Knight's Tale," 1086-91 (modified by astrology), 1108, 1109, 1303-6 (none of them in Boccaccio; 2987 ff. is); "Man of Law's Tale," 190-96, 295-315 (both astrological); "Nun's Priest's Tale," 4407, 4528; and see below.

yet its skepticism; Gower, for example, at times makes remarks somewhat like Chaucer's, but is, as usual, perfunctory, contradictory, and vague. The chief literary source of Chaucer's views is the latter part of Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae*, but it is clear that he read with deep interest what Dante has to say on the question why things happen. The striking passage in the "Inferno" in which Dante makes Fortune a sort of semi-divine intermediary between God and mundane affairs, and from which I quote the most significant lines, has directly and unmistakably influenced three or four places in Chaucer's poetry.

Questa Fortuna, che è . . . ?
 Colui lo cui saper tutto trascende
 Similmente agli splendor mondani
 Ordinò general ministra e duce,
 Che permutasse a tempo li ben vani,
 Di gente in gente e d'uno in altro sangue,
 Oltre la difension de' senni umani:
 Perchè una gente impera, e l'altra langue. . . .
 Le sue permutazion non hanno triegue.¹

Fortune, whiche that permutacioun
 Of thinges hath, as it is hir committed
 Through purveyaunce and disposicioun
 Of heighe Jove, as regnes shal ben flitted
 Fro folk in folk.²

But O, Fortune, executrice of wierdes,
 O influences of thise hevenes hye!
 Soth is, that, under god, ye ben our hierdes.³
 The destinee, ministre general,

¹ "Inferno," VII, 68, 69, 73, 77-82, 88. Clearly under the influence of Boethius, IV, prose 6 (see Oxford *Chaucer*, Vol. II, pp. 115, 116, ll. 60-71). The influences of Boethius and Dante on Chaucer here are hard to disentangle.

² Troilus and Criseyde," V, 1541-45. Noted by W. M. Rossetti, *Parallel Text Edition of the Troilus and the Filostrato* (Chaucer Society), p. 289, but ignored by Cary, Skeat, and Lounsbury. The last-named scholar professes to give (*Studies in Chaucer*, Vol. II, pp. 240, 241) a complete list of borrowings from Dante in the "Troilus," but omits also III, 1261-67 (noted by Cary and Skeat); I will add that he seems greatly to underestimate Dante's influence on Chaucer. It may not be impertinent to call attention once more to the fact that Cary, in the notes to his translation of the *Divine Comedy*, pointed out a large number of borrowings by Chaucer, as well as by other poets. Another clear case which he notes (*The Vision* [London, 1831], Vol. I, p. 201) is ignored by Skeat and Lounsbury.

"His lustes were al lawe in his decree" (of Nero, "Monk's Tale," B 3667);

"Che libito fe' licito in sua legge" (of Semiramis, "Inferno," V, 56).

On Chaucer and Dante cf. also Emil Koeppel, *Anglia*, Vol. XIII, pp. 184-86.

³ *Ibid.*, III, 617-19.

That executeth in the world over-al
 The purveyaunce that God hath seyn biforn,
 So strong it is, that, though the world had sworn
 The contrarie of a thing, by ye or nay,
 Yet somtyme it shal fallen on a day
 That falleth not eft with-inne a thousand yere.¹

As was his aventure, or his fortune,
 That us governeth alle as in commune.²

This interest of Chaucer's in fortune and the like appears also in a less important but more curious way. Such phrases as "by aventure" or "per cas" occur often enough anywhere, as well as in Chaucer's works, but such more deliberative expressions as the following are less obvious, and are decidedly characteristic of him and of his late style:

Were it by aventure, or sort, or cas,³
 And so bifel, by aventure or cas,⁴
 Were it by aventure or destinee,
 (As, whan a thing is shapen, it shal be)
 Were it by destinee or aventure,
 Were it by influence or by nature,
 Or constellacion,⁵
 But thus they mette, of aventure or grace;⁶

With these again belongs the passage above from the "Nun's Priest's Tale," 4189, 4190. Anything similar I find only in Dante:

Ei cominciò: "Qual fortuna o destino
 Anzi l'ultimo di quaggiù ti mena?"⁷
 Se voler fu, o destino, o fortuna,
 Non so: ma passeggiando tra le teste,
 Forte percossi il piè nel viso ad una.⁷

Different as the two poets were, such was the power of the one and the receptiveness of the other that the greater affected both the other's view of the universe and his style.

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¹ "Knight's Tale," A 1663-69. The last two lines are directly from "Teseide," V, 77, 1-2. The earlier part of the passage is somewhat similar to "Teseide," VI, 1, 1-4. But Chaucer's verses are more like Dante's, to which Boccaccio's are also indebted, and it may also be noted that the passage in the "Teseide" stands nearly 250 lines later than the part of that poem which Chaucer is here using.

² "Nun's Priest's Tale," B 4189, 4190.

³ "Prologue," 844.

⁴ "Knight's Tale," A 1074, 1465, 1466.

⁵ "Merchant's Tale," E 1967-69.

⁶ "Franklin's Tale," F 1508.

⁷ "Inferno," XV, 46, 47; XXXII, 76-78.